

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 093792

EXDIS, TOSEC 357

FOLLOWING REPEAT TUNIS 2764 ACTION SECSTATE 07 MAY 74

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 2764

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO THE SECRETARY

E.O. 116521 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, US

SUBJ: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S PROJECTED VISIT
TO U.S.

REF: TUNIS 2575

1. MINISTER OF INTERIOR TAHAR BELKHOJA CALLED ME TO
HIS OFFICE LATE AFTERNOON MAY 7 TO DISCUSS "ON PERSONAL
BASIS" PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S UPCOMING VISIT TO U.S.
BELKHOJA SAID THAT HE HAD SEEN BOURGUIBA JUST BEFORE LATTER
LEFT FOR SWITZERLAND AND HAD FOUND PRESIDENT CONCERNED AT
OUR INABILITY CONFIRM DATE FOR HIS AGREED-UPON VISIT TO
THE U.S.

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2. I CAREFULLY EXPLAINED SITUATION TO BELKHOJA, EMPHASIZING

THAT WHILE JUNE 5 AND 6 HAD BEEN DATES TENTATIVELY SET FOR VISIT, PRESIDENT NIXON'S PLANS CONTINUED TO BE UP IN AIR. I MENTIONED TO BELKHOJA TWO POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION SUBJECT, OF COURSE, TO WHITE HOUSE APPROVAL: (A) POSTPONING VISIT UNTIL SECOND WEEK IN JUNE: OR (B) POSTPONING VISIT UNTIL AUTUMN. I ALSO STRESSED THAT PRESIDENT NIXON'S PLANS MAY NOT BE DEFINITELY KNOWN UNTIL LATE THIS MONTH.

3. BELKHOJA SAID THAT IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT BOURGUIBA WOULD NOT RPT NOT WISH TO POSTPONE VISIT UNTIL AUTUMN AND THAT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE SECOND WEEK IN JUNE. BELKHOJA DID NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE THAT HUMID WASHINGTON SUMMER CLIMATE SHOULD BE IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MAKING DECISION AND HE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT BOURGUIBA COULD STILL MAKE HIS RENDEZVOUS IN CHINA ON 14TH IF WASHINGTON VISIT WERE SET FOR JUNE 10 OR 11. HE FELT VERY STRONGLY THAT EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO LAY ON VISIT FOR SOME DATE IN JUNE.

4. BELKHOJA AGAIN EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS "SPEAKING PERSONALLY" SINCE HE DID NOT WISH TO TREAD ON TOES OF FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI BUT IN VIEW OF OUR GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONS HE WANTED TO COMMUNICATE HIS VIEWS BASED ON HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH BOURGUIBA. EVEN IF DEFINITE DECISION RE PRESIDENT NIXON'S PLANS CANNOT BE MADE FOR ANOTHER WEEK OR SO, HE, BELKHOJA, PREFERRED TO WAIT AND NOT PROPOSE OR CONSIDER AT THIS TIME ALTERNATIVE OF VISIT NEXT AUTUMN.

5. COMMENT: I BELIEVE THAT BELKHOJA IS PROBABLY ACCURATELY REFLECTING BOURGUIBA'S VIEWS. BELKHOJA HAS TALKED TO BOURGUIBA MORE RECENTLY THAN CHATTI WHO, AS DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL, HAD PROPOSED FOR CONSIDERATION ALTERNATIVE OF VISIT IN FALL. IF WE ARE UNABLE TO LINE UP VISIT FOR BOURGUIBA TO U.S. SOMETIME IN JUNE AND IF, IN ADDITION, PRESIDENT NIXON BYPASSES TUNIS IN ANY POSSIBLE TRIP HE MAY MAKE TO MIDDLE EAST, I AM AFRAID THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S NOSE WILL BE OUT OF JOINT. AS I HAVE INDICATED EARLIER, A BYPASS OF TUNIS BY PRESIDENT NIXON IS MANAGEABLE IN TERMS OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, BUT I FEAR THAT TO ADD TO THIS

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A POSTPONEMENT OF BOURGUIBA'S VISIT TO U.S. BEYOND JUNE WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE. I PROPOSE THAT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO ALTERNATIVE DATE FOR VISIT OF JUNE 10 - 11. SEELYE
UNQTE RUSH

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